

North Searles Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA)

RMA/RECREATION MANAGEMENT ZONE (RMZ) OBJECTIVE(S) DECISIONS

Objective Statement: The SRMA includes northern Searles Valley, Slate Range, and non-wilderness portions of the Argus Range. Continue to provide outstanding recreational environments that focus on low to high impact multi-use recreation along with the enhancement of primitive and dispersed recreation that serve multiple publics. The goal is to maintain, sustain, and protect the broad range of recreational uses and special recreation permitted events ranging from technical 4-wheel drive touring that takes specially equipped motorized vehicles exploring historic areas to horsebacking to simple or arduous hiking adventures.

Activities: The primary activities for the North Searles SRMA are rugged backcountry motor vehicle 4-wheel drive touring, primarily by specially equipped jeeps but also accessed by experienced operators of dual sport bikes and hikers. Other main activities are rock hounding, hunting, equestrian riding, photography, climbing, and mountain biking. The area hosts many events each year under special recreation permits. The types of events include jeep, equestrian and dual sport touring.

Experiences: This SRMA provides a place to escape to for a real weekend adventure, whether it be grinding your vehicle up a challenging and rugged jeep trail, rock climbing one of the granite faces in Great Falls Basin, urging a horse over the Slates and into Panamint Valley on an 80-mile ride from Ridgecrest to Death Valley, hunters flush out chukar from well-watered canyons in the Argus, picking over cobbles in a desert wash, photographing historic mine sites in the area, following an old mining foot trail.

Benefits: Individuals, families, and friends from outside the area seek out the SRMA to get away from cities and the stresses and pressures of urban life. The most active use season extends from October through May.

Locals from Trona and Homewood Canyon use these places more casually, to wind down when they get off work. The Slates and Argus Range are viewed as extensions of these residents' own backyards. Great Falls Basin in particular works this way for Trona residents. It is the family picnic and party place of choice. It is less than 5 miles away from the community and directly accessible by dirt roads so residents can use off-road vehicles to get there. The area is particularly inviting to residents in the spring time when the water is still flowing and the weather is getting hotter.

The area provides excellent habitat for many sensitive and endemic T&E species including Inyo California towhee, desert tortoise, Mohave ground squirrel, Nelson's bighorn sheep, bats among others.

Personal: An enjoyment of local scenery, geology, mining history, increased health and fitness, and participation in family activities and activities with friends.

Community/Social: Increased tourism and revenue for the local economy. Greater community ownership and stewardship of desert resources.

Environmental: Protect the cultural, natural and visual resource while providing recreation opportunities.

RECREATION SETTING CHARACTERISTICS (RSC) DESCRIPTIONS

Physical Components: The area encompasses both open desert floor as well as the steep mountainous terrain of both the Argus and Slate Ranges.

The network of exceptional scenic, primitive jeep trails is one of the areas principal attractions. Several of these jeep trails are historic in nature, following the alleged wagon route of the ill-fated Manly Party in 1849 in the case of the Escape Trail, or of Remi Nadeau's principal 19th century mining supply and transport route along the Argus Range leading into the Panamint Valley. Historic mining trails provide for foot and equestrian access to historic sites off of the designated vehicle route system.

While visitors use these rugged jeep trails and hike to visit as much of the area as possible, visitors tend to congregate and camp in just a few select locations, principally at Great Falls Basin or near the old Valley Wells site. Outside of the popular camping sites, it is still possible to find isolated campsites as much as 5 miles away from anyone else.

Social Components: A few hardy individuals visit the SRMA, however, most people come here in small groups of family and friends. Great Falls Basin, the Slates and the Argus Range are often frequented by locals from Trona and Homewood Canyon, who bring their families and buddies out on the weekends and after work to picnic, party, target shoot, collect rocks, and hunt. Many of these visitors use off-road vehicles and use the surrounding jeep trails to explore the area. Local equestrians take advantage of the many historic mining trails found in the area. Boy and Girl Scouts often use areas in Great Falls Basin, including Indian Joe Canyon, to learn primitive skills and the rudiments of camping and backpacking. Many rock climbers, hikers, and backpackers use the area in winter time when climbing, hiking and backpacking areas in most of the Sierras are closed by snow. The group sizes for Special Recreation Permits start from 25 to 250 participants.

Much of this area is too hot to use comfortably in summer (June, July, August, and September). Temperatures at this time of year can be in the triple digits. In October use picks up considerably, as the weather cools down, bringing many visitors from the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area, but also from as far away as Santa Barbara and San Francisco. These visitors will typically pack up after work on Friday and drive more than 200 miles to stay through the weekend, leaving late Sunday, in time for work the next morning. These are often family outings, as well as opportunities to get away from it all, to relax and do something exciting and out of the ordinary with small groups of friends.

Operational Components: Visitor amenities are very minimal, consisting mostly of a network of primitive, unmaintained rugged off camber jeep trails (signed, open designated routes) and information, including maps, posted on kiosks or provided in brochures. Two iron fire rings with grills have been installed at the camping area at the base of the falls in Great Falls Basin. Otherwise, all camp sites are user-created and primitive, ranging in size from small (suitable for one or two vehicles only) to very large (suitable for multiple vehicles). There are many old mining cabins in the area that are frequently used as camp sites.

MANAGEMENT ACTIONS & ALLOWABLE USES

Acres by Alternative on BLM Lands:

No Action	Preferred Alternative	1	2	3	4
0	54,215	44,787	42,161	44,788	44,788

Recreation and Visitor Services Program: Standard BLM two-week camping limits on public lands in one location are enforced. Vehicle use is limited to designated routes only.

Other Programs: Continue with natural resource multiple use management practices within the area. Allow all types of activities to occur within the area, except those with unacceptable safety concerns or degrading to the environment. Developed recreation sites are withdrawn from mineral entry.

Manage all routes of travel as designated in the Local TTMP.

Renewable energy development is not an allowable use in SRMAs due to the incompatibility with the values of the SRMA. Two exceptions to this management action are: 1) geothermal development is an allowable use if a geothermal-only DFA overlays the SRMA designation and complies with a “no surface occupancy” restriction; and, 2) in the Preferred Alternatives if a DRECP variance land designation overlays the SRMA, renewable energy may be allowed on a case-by-case basis if the proposed project is compatible with the SRMA values.

Most of this area has been proposed for VRM Class II. The objective of VRM Class II is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change should be low. Management activities may be seen but should not attract attention. Some parts of Searles Valley within the SRMA have been proposed for VRM Class III. The objective of VRM Class III is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change should be moderate. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view. These VRM classes do not conflict with existing recreational uses.

Implementation Decisions: An activity level plan would be developed to identify and designate current and future recreational opportunities, appropriate facilities to provide for and manage the proposed uses, parameters for streamlined Special Recreation Permitting of recreation events, staffing and funding needs, parameters for facility and road/trail maintenance, partnerships, possible recreation fee considerations, and an implementation schedule.

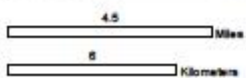
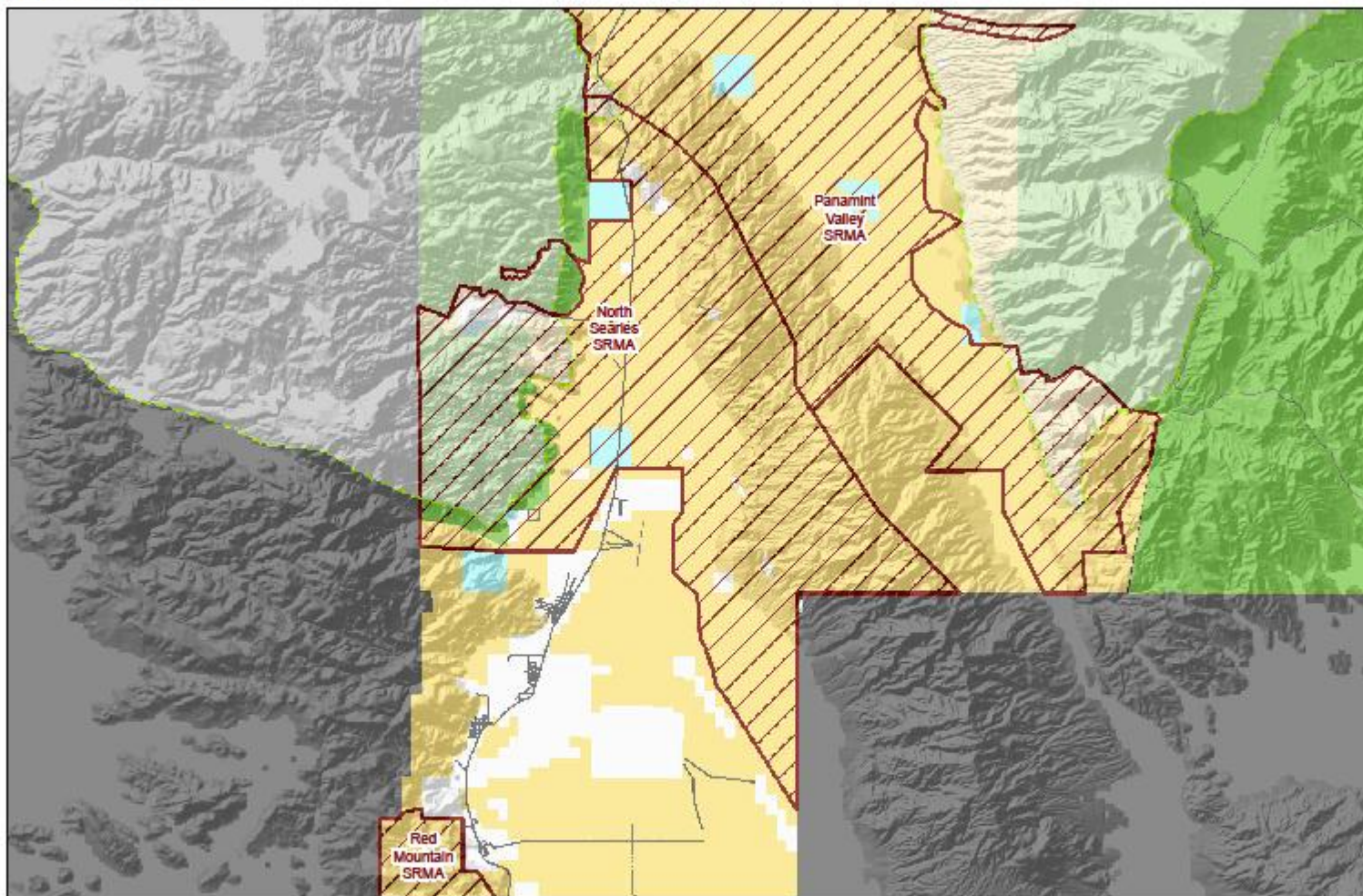
1. Limit vehicles to open designated routes and prevent new user-created routes from developing and proliferating.
2. After consulting the area route inventory and drafting up travel and transportation management plan, restore closed routes, unauthorized vehicle play areas, and unauthorized hill climbs.
3. Preserve old historic (non-motorized) mining trails used for hiking and equestrian purposes as such type trails. These trails are historic in nature and should be maintained as historic resources in coordination with the Cultural Resources staff.

4. Protect National Register eligible properties, which have ethnographic significance to several of the tribes today. Prevent disturbance to existing cultural resources so research can be conducted and interpretative opportunities are not lost.
5. Protect historic cabin resources from unauthorized recreation and modification. Work with volunteers to record, stabilize, and interpret structures for visitors.
6. Prohibit target shooting in sensitive areas and where people typically congregate in large numbers to park or camp, i.e., the camping area at the base of the falls in Great Falls Basin.
7. Improve visitor services (maps, brochures, and kiosks), maintain signs, restoration sites, and continue to work with general and community volunteers to clean-up parking, trail head, and camping areas, particularly at Great Falls Basin.
8. Establish camping areas and install fire rings and picnic tables at decided areas.

Mitigation:

1. Maintain through traffic motorized route network connectivity with roads and trails leading into and through the North Searles SRMA.
2. Manage renewable energy development on adjacent and nearby lands to avoid traffic conflicts with visitors & permitted uses.

North Searles SRMA



Preferred Alternative SRMAs and ERMAs



Date Printed: 6/25/2014

Prepared by BLM California State Office



ACEC Layers

Proposed SRMA

Design Focus Areas

OHV Areas

Legislatively and Legally Protected

Cities

CDCA Boundary

DRECP Boundary

BLM Field Office

Land Status

Bureau of Land Management

State

Other Federal

Military

Private

GTIF

Interstate

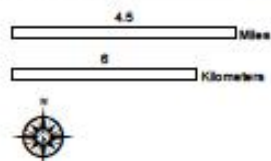
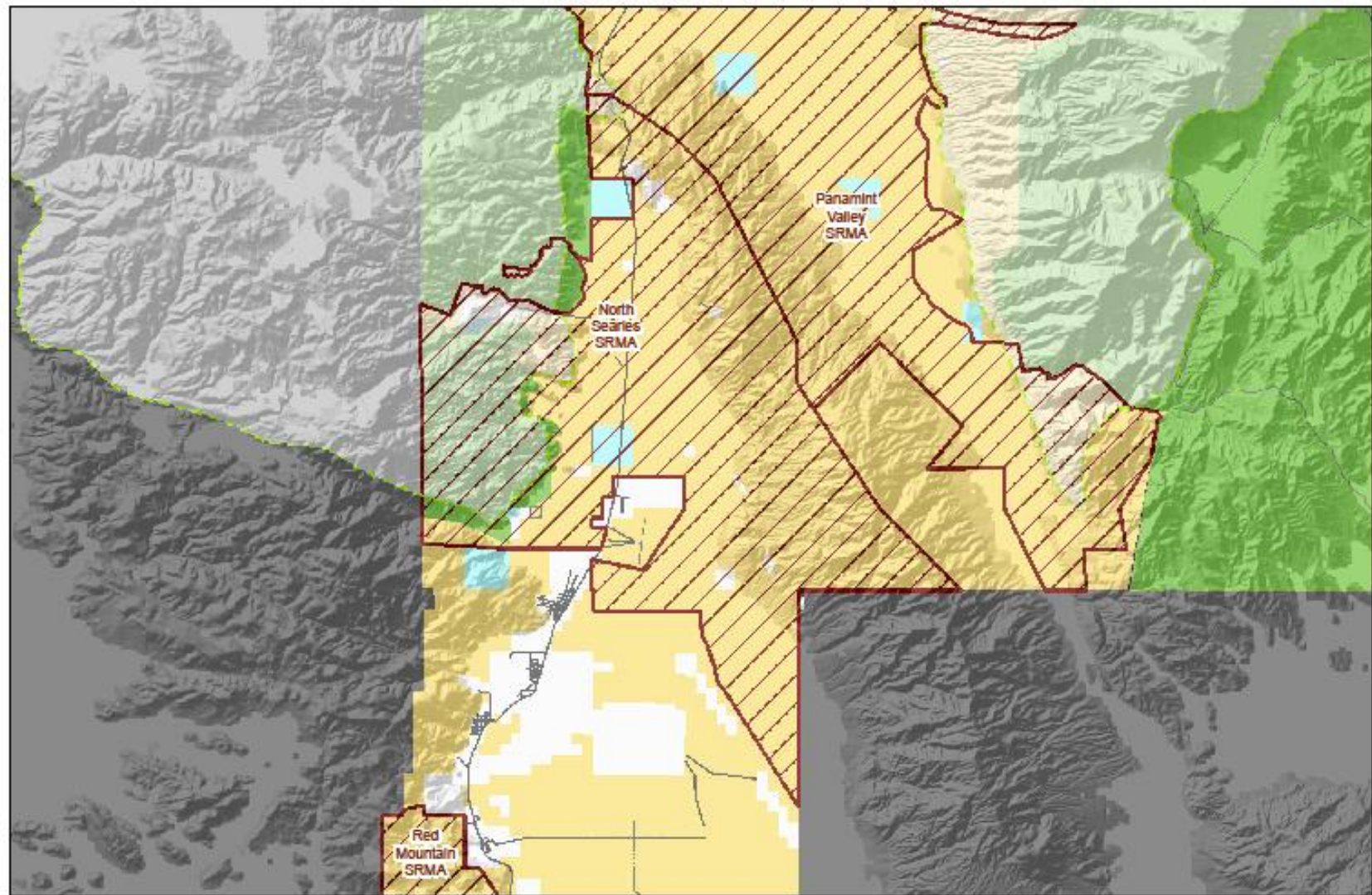
US Hwy

CA Hwy

County Hwy



North Searles SRMA



Alternative 1 SRMAs

Date Printed: 6/25/2014

Prepared by BLM California State Office



ACEC Layers

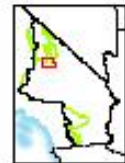
- Proposed SRMA
- Design Focus Areas
- OHV Areas
- Legislatively and Legally Protected
- Cities
- CDCA Boundary
- DRECP Boundary
- BLM Field Office

Land Status

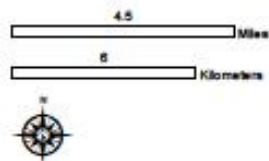
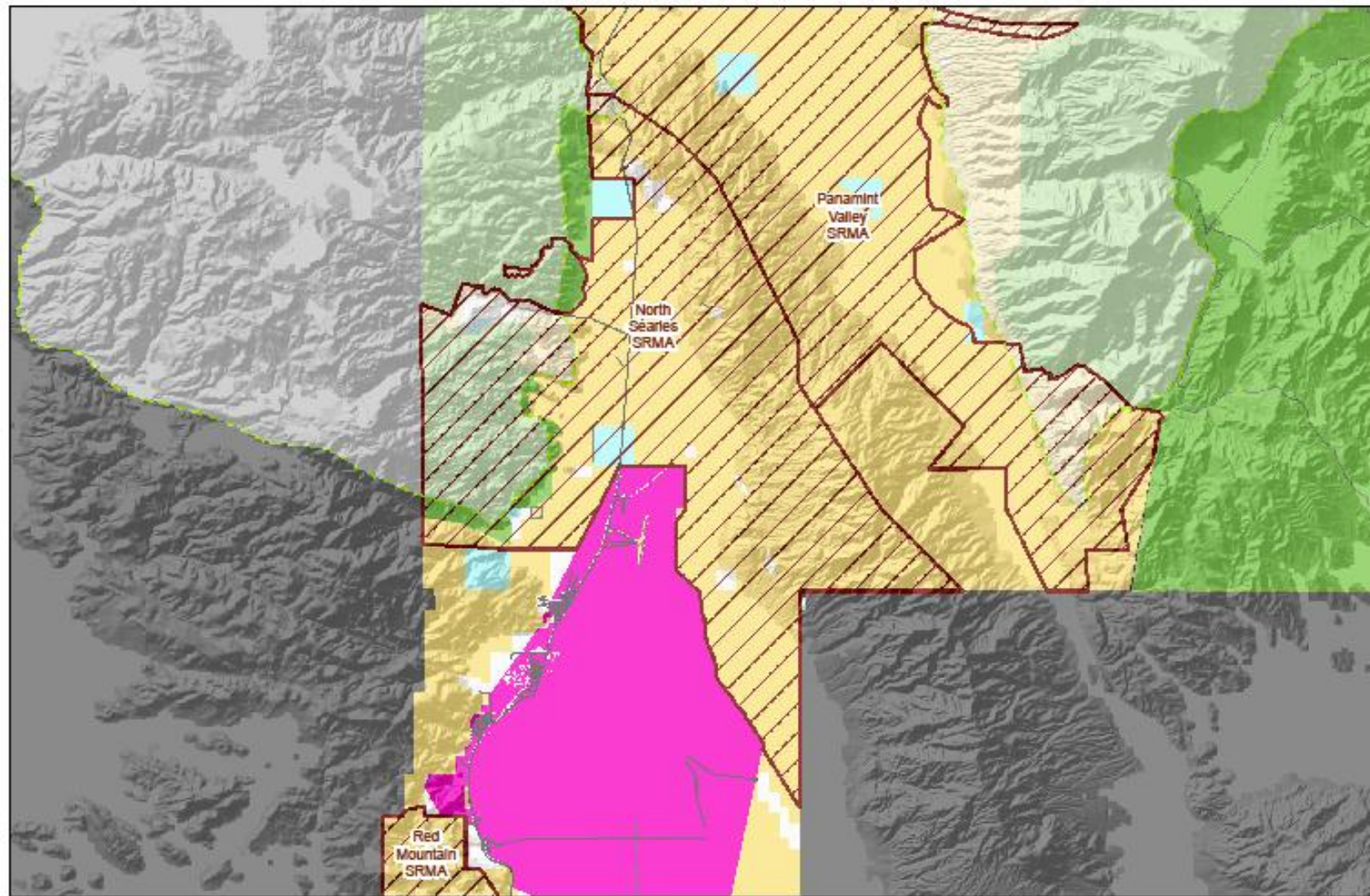
- Bureau of Land Management
- State
- Other Federal
- Military
- Private

OTIF

- Interstate
- US Hwy
- CA Hwy
- County Hwy



North Searles SRMA



Alternative 2 SRMAs

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Prepared by BLM California State Office



ACEC Layers

- Proposed SRMA
- Design Focus Areas
- OHV Areas
- Legally and Legally Protected
- Cities
- CDCA Boundary
- DRECP Boundary
- BLM Field Office

Land Status

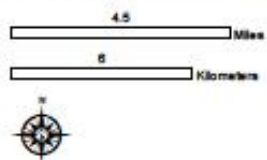
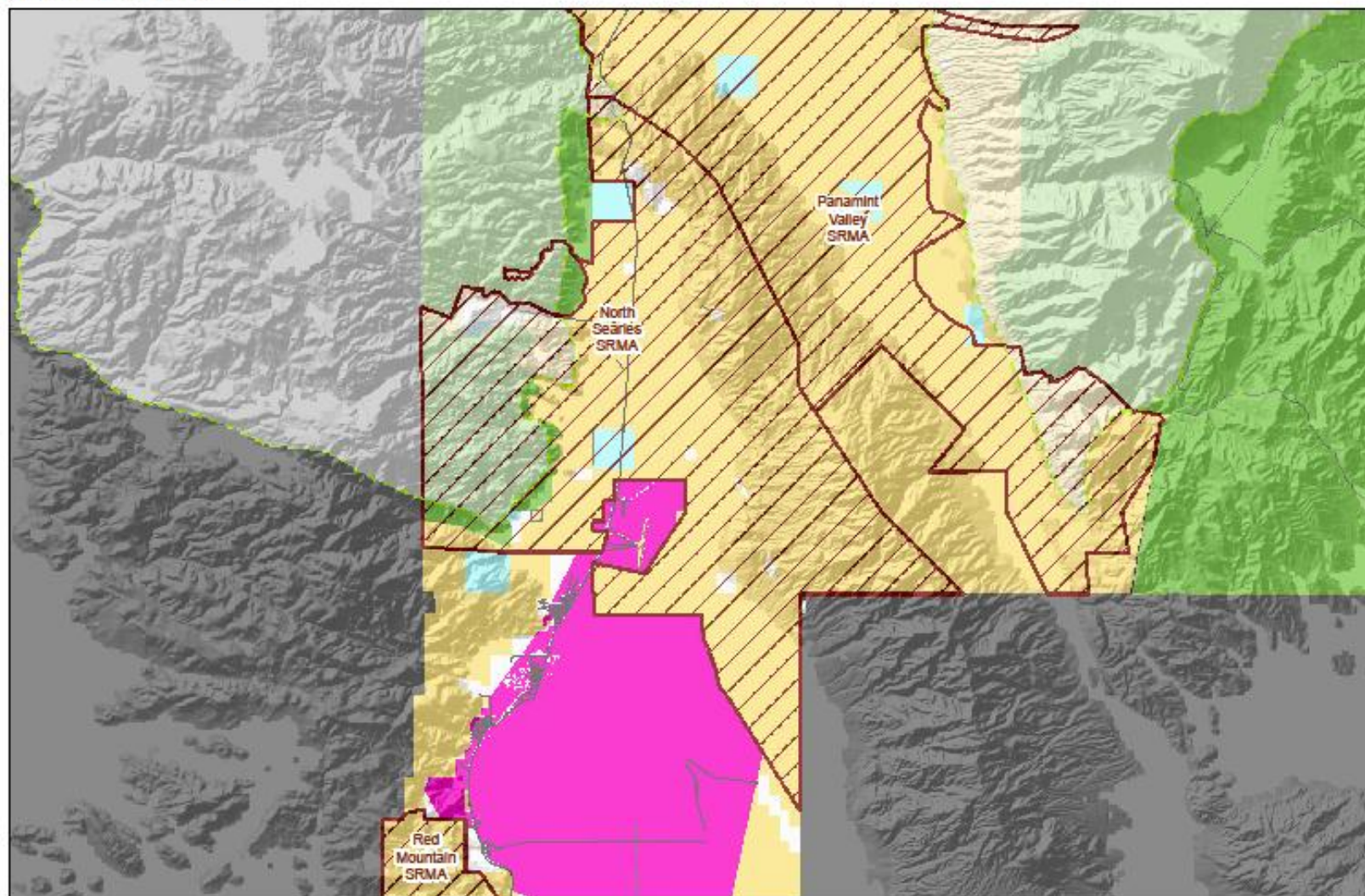
- Bureau of Land Management
- State
- Other Federal
- Military
- Private

GTLP

- Interstate
- US Hwy
- CA Hwy
- County Hwy



North Searles SRMA



Alternative 3 SRMAs

Date Printed: 6/25/2014

Prepared by BLM California State Office



ACEC Layers

- Proposed SRMA
- Design Focus Areas
- OHV Areas
- Legislatively and Legally Protected
- Cities
- CDCA Boundary
- DRECP Boundary
- BLM Field Office

Land Status

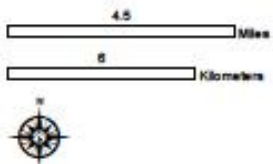
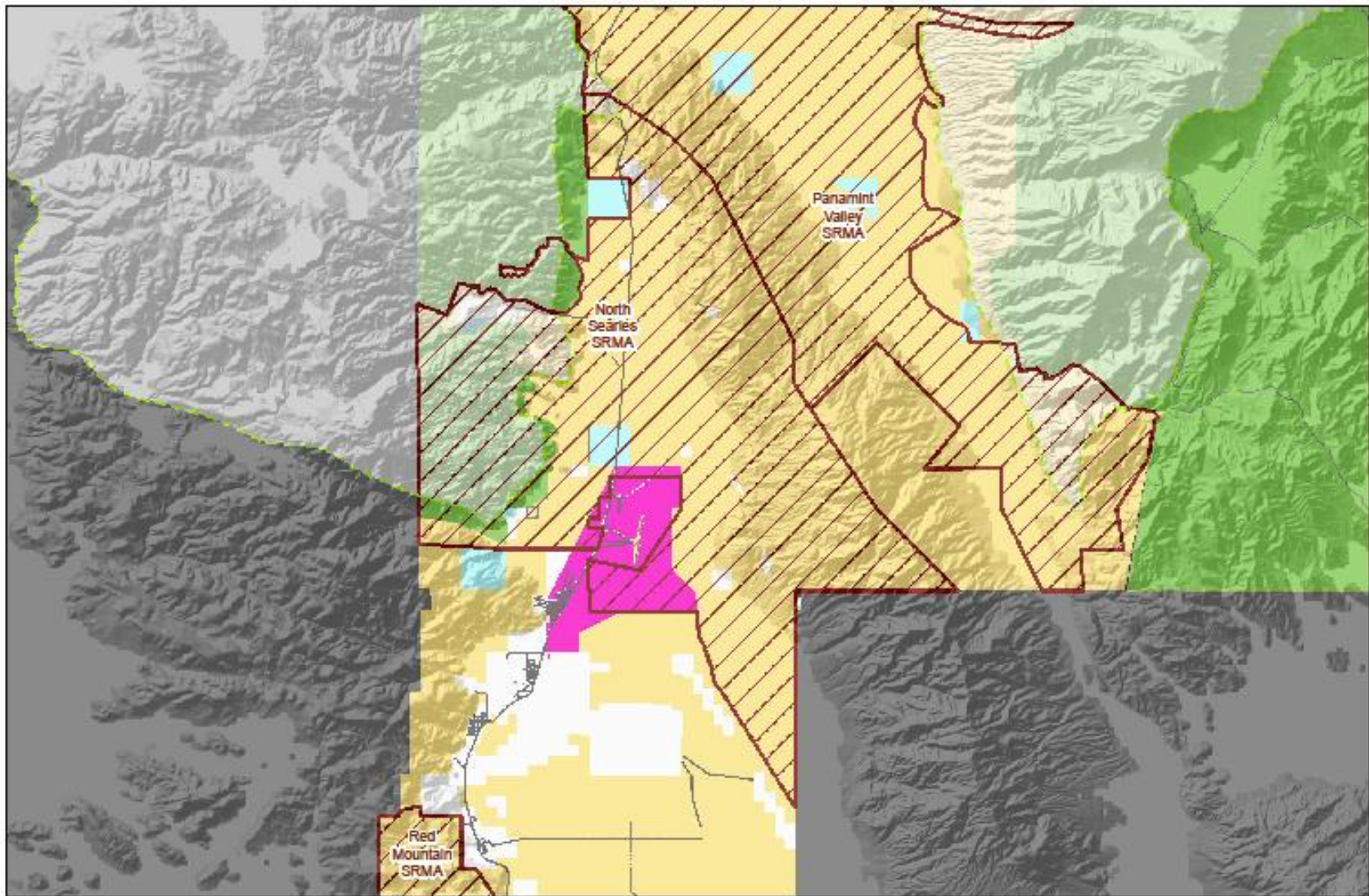
- Bureau of Land Management
- State
- Other Federal
- Military
- Private

OTIF

- Interstate
- US Hwy
- CA Hwy
- County Hwy



North Searles SRMA



Alternative 4 SRMAs
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 Prepared by BLM California State Office



ACEC Layers

- Proposed SRMA
- Design Focus Areas
- OHV Areas
- Legislatively and Legally Protected
- Cities
- CDCA Boundary
- DRECP Boundary
- BLM Field Office

Land Status

- Bureau of Land Management
- State
- Other Federal
- Military
- Private

GTIF

- Interstate
- US Hwy
- CA Hwy
- County Hwy

